

Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. 343 pages. Available in paperback (ISBN 978-1-4129-5882-0).

Reviewed by Craig Defries

Culturally responsive research requires comprehension of the destructive impact of colonization and the value of indigenous ways of knowing, as well as a willingness to approach research as a co-researcher. From that premise, and from the totality of her professional and personal experience Bagele Chilisa leads the reader along a new path of understanding in terms of indigenous experience and research possibilities, offering hope and practical guidance.

In the first half of the book, Chilisa explains that Euro-western and indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies differ significantly. Western-based research, influenced by an individualistic, top-down lens, continues to de-emphasize the pervasive damage of colonization (e.g., the power dynamic of superior colonizer and inferior colonized other) and often invalidates indigenous knowledge, experience, and research methods. Conversely, indigenous peoples relate research to life, to the connection between individual and community, and to time in ongoing relationships. The emphasis on physical, communal, and cultural connectedness means research is not a separate entity.

In the second half of the book Chilisa focuses on how to implement research from a *postcolonial indigenous research methodological* approach. Postcolonial indigenous research methodology begins and ends with a culturally responsive methodology that incorporates theoretical frameworks, literature, research practice, value systems, and ethical assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge as part of an integrated whole, where the value of the circle, the connection between the living and nonliving, and the relationship between the individual and the community and the universe act as guiding principles. She draws further from her culture's philosophy of *Ubuntu* that values balancing self-respect and respect for the other as a basis for conducting research. Postcolonial indigenous research methodologies require researchers to invest time to first develop relationships, followed by a long-term commitment. Research must ultimately be accountable to the community. This has implications for not only how information is shared in the process, but how it is shared once the project is completed.

From a student's perspective, this is an intensive book to read over a short period. It is written as a course textbook, meant to be reflected on and reviewed over the course of a term, or even referred back to over time when the levels of theoretical complexity can be absorbed and appreciated more fully. When used

Corresponding author: Craig Defries; craigwdefries@gmail.com

in a classroom setting, the case scenarios, quotes, key points, charts, and focused discussion guides are useful resources for encouraging discussion and augmenting understanding. On the whole it is a comprehensive and encouraging guide to approaching this type of research responsibly and respectfully.

Chilisa's periodic variation or unclear definitions initially present minor distractions. However, they also contribute to finding a "third way" of thinking about postcolonial indigenous methodologies. For example, from the standpoint of historical subjugation and oppression, she expands the term *indigenous* at various points to include African-American people, deaf people, and people of various sexual orientations. As a social worker, I found this flexible definition encouraging, particularly when thinking of the potentially transferable qualities of postcolonial indigenous methodologies to research with various marginalized groups. When speaking of globalization, she expands the definition of *colonizer* to include China and Japan. Rereading Chilisa's explanation of postcolonial theories of colonizer/colonized-other dichotomies in terms of binary opposites, critical race and structural theory, and perspectives on globalization was particularly helpful in understanding and separating the people/masses on the periphery from the privileged/powerful few at the centre and the implications of this on an understanding of the effects of colonialist aftershocks on present-day class and political differences and conflict, both internationally and within indigenous societies. Chilisa's own story of being trained in the West and moving back to Botswana, her experience with HIV/Aids research in Botswana, and the impact of *academic imperialism* on Botswana's HIV/Aids research and public health initiatives is especially helpful as a personal point of reference.

The emphasis throughout the second half of the book on partnership, borrowing from Euro-Western methods as deemed appropriate by the indigenous community, and the spirit of healing and transformation contrasts noticeably with the previous chapters. In retrospect it is a metaphor for the spirit in which the book is written: acknowledging the harm of colonialism; honouring the inherent value of indigenous ontology, epistemology, and axiology, and the practical methods that are not just for gaining knowledge, but are also a respectful and responsible way to help indigenous communities reclaim their stories, reclaim their past, and reclaim their future—essentially, heal. Chilisa's imperative to fully understand indigenous peoples and research methods in the full context of colonization is an effective impetus for reader introspection, and is one of the key lessons of this book. Postcolonial indigenous research methodologies require a high level of commitment to overall accountability to indigenous researched communities that is above and beyond the parameters and duration of the project itself. There is an opportunity to expand our conception of the researcher role to that of a *transformative healer*, who can work with the indigenous peoples as co-researchers, setting the research agenda, and carrying out the work together. Indeed, Chilisa's insistence that research projects not become stuck in a problem/deficit perspective is especially pertinent, and her introduction of the positive I/We spirit of Ubuntu and other Afrocentric principles offers refreshing added

value by allowing both the researcher and the indigenous community a new way to regard themselves and each other.

By writing *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, Bagele Chilisa has provided evaluators and researchers thought-provoking historical perspectives and a challenge to look at how research is conducted from the perspective of indigenous communities. She also, however, shows us a creative, diverse, and positive way forward, where indigenous communities can ultimately envision their future and speak for themselves.